



Department of Planning and Zoning



Amendments to the Zoning Regulations

What are the Zoning Regulations?

The Howard County Charter and Code empower the County Council to adopt maps dividing the County into zoning districts and regulations governing the use of land within these districts. Together, the zoning maps and regulations are known as the County's Comprehensive Zoning Plan.

How can the Zoning Regulations be amended?

A petition to amend the Zoning Regulations, (Zoning Regulation Amendment, (ZRA)) may be initiated by any interested person, the Department of Planning and Zoning or a member of the County Council or an appointed County board. The petition must specify the particular section of the Zoning Regulations to be amended and the proposed new text. The Howard County Council makes decisions on these petitions.

The County Council office has application forms and instructions for submitting ZRA petitions. Completed petitions and required fees may be submitted to the administrative assistant to the Zoning Board in the Council office.

ZRA petitions may be submitted at any time. However, during a year when councilmanic elections are held, the Council may not take final action on a petition after the date of the primary election.

What is the amendment process?

After receiving a petition to amend the Zoning Regulations, the County Council forwards copies of the petition to the Department of Planning and Zoning. The Department produces a Technical Staff Report, which includes comments from applicable County and State agencies, an evaluation and a recommendation on the proposal. The Howard County Planning Board holds a public meeting on the petition and also makes a recommendation.

After receiving the Planning Board recommendation and Technical Staff Report, the chairperson of the County Council introduces a Council Bill proposing adoption of the text amendment as proposed by the petitioner. If Planning and Zoning or the Planning Board has recommended changes to the proposed text, the Council reviews the changes and a Council member may introduce them as an amendment to the Bill.

The Council Bill is introduced and heard in accordance with the Council's normal schedule for proposed legislation. Generally, new legislation is introduced at the Council's session on the first Monday of the month; a public hearing on the legislation is held on the third Monday; and the legislation is voted upon on the first Monday of the next month. If additional time is needed, legislation may be tabled for 30 to 60 days before a vote is taken.

If the Council approves the Bill, it is sent to the County Executive, who may sign or veto the Bill. A vote of two-thirds of the County Council, or four of the five members, is necessary in order to override a veto. A Bill becomes effective 60 days after being signed by the County Executive.

How is the public notified?

Zoning Regulation Amendment cases scheduled for a Planning Board meeting are posted online at www.howardcountymd.gov.

After a Council Bill has been introduced, the title and a brief description of the Bill are listed on the Council's schedule of upcoming legislation, which must be posted in the George Howard Building outside the Council office. The title and hearing schedule for the Bill must also be published once a week for two successive weeks in at least one newspaper of general circulation in the County. The Council office will mail the Council's upcoming agenda to any person or organization that requests to be placed on the Council's mailing list for this purpose.

How can citizens participate?

In order to make the best decision possible, it is important that the County Council have the benefit of the testimony of all interested parties. Citizens are urged to comment on proposed ZRA, orally or in writing. Community associations interested in a proposal are encouraged to appoint an officer or representative to testify on their behalf.

Anyone interested in a proposed text amendment may speak on the amendment at the Planning Board meeting and the County Council's public hearing. In addition, written comments to the Planning Board may be submitted to the Department of Planning and Zoning prior to the Board's public meeting. Written comments to the County Council may be submitted to the Council office at any time before the Council's vote on the Bill. Citizens may also discuss the proposed text amendment with a Council member.

How are Zoning Regulation Amendments?

Title 16, Section 16.202 of the County Code empowers the County Council to adopt Zoning Regulations and maps "for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, morals and general welfare of Howard County." The Council's decision on an amendment to the regulations will be based on this overall purpose. More specifically, the Council will evaluate the proposal's consistency with the Howard County General Plan, with the "Legislative Intent" of the Zoning Regulations (Section 100.A of the Zoning Regulations) and with the purpose stated in the Zoning Regulations for the particular zoning district(s) that would be affected by the ZRA. The Council will also consider how the amendment interacts with other provisions of the Zoning Regulations and other County laws and regulations.

An important note...

This information provides a general overview of the process for amending the Zoning Regulations. More detailed information is found in other documents including the County Charter, the County Code and the Zoning Regulations.

For more information contact:

The Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning
(410) 313-2350, TTY 410-313-2323 or www.howardcountymd.gov or visit Planning & Zoning's Customer Service Center on the first floor of the George Howard Building, 3430 Courthouse Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland, 212043.

Office Hours are:

Monday through Friday
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Written inquiries may also be sent to our office at the above address.

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